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SUBJECT: Somalia - Puntland Success in Anti-Piracy Operation

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¶1. On October 14, security forces from Somalia's semi-autonomous Puntland Region completed a successful operation against pirates operating off Somalia's coast. On October 9, pirates seized the Panamanian-flagged vessel "The Wail" while it was en route from Oman to the Bossaso port in Puntland. On October 14, Puntland security forces raided the ship and successfully liberated the vessel and its crew of nine Syrians and two Somalis.

¶2. On October 15, Puntland Foreign Minister Ali Abdi Aware contacted us to discuss the successful mission. He told PolOff "We have now completed big operations and have been victorious. Even when our forces were wounded, we did not give up." Puntland forces made a first attempt to free the ship on October 19, engaging in an armed confrontation with the pirates that reportedly resulted in the death of two pirates and one of Puntland's security officers. Aware said, "We can do more."

¶3. Minister Aware then put Puntland President Mohamed Muse Hersi on the line and we congratulated him on the mission. President Hersi stated that while other international forces are just observing the activities of the pirates and nations are encouraging piracy with the payment of high ransoms, Puntland is ready to take action. Hersi said that although they have only three low-speed boats, they have been able to accomplish two successful operations. (Note: In April, Puntland rescued an Indian ship and crew after they were given permission to interdict). President Hersi concluded, "We need help - we need a coast guard."

¶4. Minister Aware continued the telephone call stating that with the recent capture of these ten pirates, Puntland has more than 30 persons in its jails for piracy-related offenses. "Our jails are full and we do not know what to do with all of these criminals who are using Puntland as a base for their activities." Aware echoed once again a plea for assistance and requested a more detailed discussion of the points raised in President Hersi's response to Assistant Secretary Frazer's letter urging more action on piracy (reftel). He said that an investment in developing Puntland's maritime security capacity would benefit the international community.

¶5. Transitional Federal Government Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Information, Youth and Sports Ahmed Abdisalam Adan told us on October 15 that throughout Somalia, piracy is now considered a legitimate business. Young people with no opportunities are especially vulnerable and they increasingly are looking to support their families through activities on the high seas, Minister Abdisalam said.

¶6. There have been more than 70 piracy attacks off the coast of Somalia this year. The most recent vessel, a Philippine bulk carrier flying a Panamanian flag, was seized on October 15 in the Gulf of Aden while on its way to Asia. The International Maritime

Bureau reports that eleven hijacked ships remain in the hands of pirates, along with more than 200 crew members.

MUSE